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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002792

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ERBIL: MORE BELLIGERENT KURDISH RHETORIC SIGNAL
OF HEIGHTENED TENSIONS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2702
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2660

Classified By: RRT Deputy Leader Tamlyn; reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Increasingly heated rhetoric from Kurdish interlocutors is a sign of the strain placed on the Shia/Kurdish alliance following the failed effort to pass the provincial elections law and the GOI demand that the 34th Peshmerga unit withdraw from Diyala. In an August 21 meeting, a senior advisor to KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani was deeply pessimistic about relations between Erbil and Baghdad. He and other hard-line Kurds are openly speculating that recent "Arab" actions may require a resort to force to maintain the Kurdistan Regional Government,s (KRG) territorial control and autonomy in Iraq) points reinforced during Senior Advisor Krajewski's August 24-28 trip to the KRG (septel). KRG officials are increasingly inclined to fault the U.S. for not recognizing that (in their view) the Kurds are the only true U.S. ally in Iraq, and to condemn the U.S. for urging the Kurds to make disproportionate political concessions. End Summary.

Diyala Events Signal "Shia Strategy" to Push Kurds above Green Line

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[1](#)2. (C) Dr. Nouri Sinjari, Chief of Staff to KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, told RRT Deputy Team Leader (DTL) and RRTOff August 21 that the Kurds remain the only true US ally in Iraq, yet the US continues to push the Kurds "too far." Citing the "unconditional support" the Kurds gave to GoI Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki last year at the USG's request, Dr. Nouri said the Kurds now regret that decision, as it allowed Maliki to consolidate his power. He said the recent events in Diyala signal the beginning of a Shia strategy to push Kurdish forces back behind the pre-2003 Green Line. Maliki is feeling strong, Dr. Nouri said, and that Kurds "would fight" if Arab aggression continued. Clearly concerned that the withdrawal of the 34th Peshmerga unit portended similar requests for other Peshmerga withdrawals, he warned, "don't push us past our lines) we will fight."

[1](#)3. (C) Concerning Diyala, an exasperated Dr. Nouri said that the Kurds moved south of Khanqin, Diyala Province at Maliki's direct request in 2006. Instead of thanking the 34th Peshmerga unit for their work in stabilizing the area, Dr. Nouri fumed, Maliki gave them 48 hours to depart. Dr. Nouri expected that the ensuing vacuum would allow a corridor for AQ to enter from Iran)exactly the situation which the Peshmerga had been asked to prevent. Dr. Nouri described an August 19 meeting between Sunni tribes and KRG PM Barzani, in which the tribes asked PM Barzani to send back the 34th unit and defend them against the Shia. Dr. Nouri also said that the Iraqi Minister of Defense had asked the Kurds to remain,

only for PM Maliki to ignore his request (Dr. Nouri believes that the Prime Minister is under the negative influence of the Iraqi Air Force). The Kurds would never incorporate the 34th Peshmerga unit into the Iraqi Army (IA), Dr. Nouri said, noting that Baghdad wanted to keep the IA an Arab army, facilitating future attacks against the Kurds.

U.S. failing its "only true ally"

14. (C) Dr. Nouri vigorously chastised DTL and RRTOff for the U.S. failure to realize that the Kurds were its only true ally in Iraq. He asked repeatedly (if rhetorically) for RRT members to explain what the United States had done for the Kurdistan region and bemoaned the lack of a "U.S. Kurdish policy." Arguing that the U.S. treated the Kurds as unimportant and did not give Kurdish requirements due consideration, he threatened that "we could create problems for Iraq." He also spoke disparagingly about U.S. assistance in the KRG, noting "you waste your money on NGOs and journalists that just cause problems(.and you achieve nothing." He added that NGOs were useless, given the Kurdish tribal mentality, and expressed his confidence that the KRG would take hundred of years to develop into a democracy. When DTL and RRTOff attempted to describe the millions of dollars spent on infrastructure projects in the KRG, Dr. Nouri brushed aside the comments, noting that all the US efforts are focused on other parts of Iraq.

Comment and look ahead

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15. (C) As the KRG Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, Dr. Nouri is able to influence the work of KRG ministries, and - although he does not engage directly in negotiations with Baghdad - he is in a position to influence KRG PM Barzani's perspective. His provocative statements reflect an unvarnished view of what may be the dominant KRG perspective on relations with Baghdad. While senior Kurdish officials -- especially Iraq President Jalal Talabani but also (to a lesser extent) KRG President Masoud Barzani -- make more restrained private and public statements and have a more nuanced view of KRG-Baghdad relations, the tendency among Kurds to contemplate a "back to the trenches" position when feeling threatened makes it harder to de-escalate crises. Souring relationships between Kurds and Arabs over Kirkuk and a reemergent concern that their Arab neighbors will again betray them could push the Kurds further into a bunker mentality, allowing hard-line Kurds to drown out the moderate voices still open to compromise. Dr. Nouri's emphasis on the Kurdish willingness to fight - combined with KRG Minister Mohammed Ihsan's recent remark that the Kurds are pursuing a military strategy (Ref B) - are ominous indications of a readiness to pursue other options should political negotiations between the Kurds and Arabs stall. End Comment.
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